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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the threats to effective single parent leadership gave rise to a problem-solving training package for the single-parent family. This package was designed to meet the clinical intervention needs of single-parent families with preadolescent and adolescent children. Highly structured procedures and professional supervision permit carefully selected and trained nonprofessionals to provide and evaluate these services to single-parent families with diverse presenting problems. Problem-solving training has two broad goals: (1) Alleviate the family's presenting problems by teaching family members to write and successfully implement contingency contracts, (2) Insure that after training succeeds, and contact with the trainer has faded, family members will conduct weekly family management sessions during which they exercise the problem-solving skills during training. Part I of this paper presents basic assumptions about the intervention needs of single-parent families, and describes how problem-solving training fits these needs. Part II presents the component objectives and steps in training, and describes procedures for evaluation and for fading client-trainer contact. Part III presents the training procedures as they might be gradually presented to a family (or a novice trainer), addressing frequently asked questions. (Author)

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A Problem-Solving Training Package for the Single Parent Family

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Running Head: A Problem-Solving Training Package

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Abstract

An analysis of the threats to effective single parent leadership gave rise to a problem-solving training package for the single-parent family. This package was designed to meet the clinical intervention needs of single-parent families with preadolescent and adolescent children. Highly structured procedures and professional supervision permit carefully selected and trained nonprofessionals to provide and evaluate these services to single-parent families with diverse presenting problems. Problem-solving training has two broad goals: (a) Alleviate the family's presenting problems by teaching family members to write and successfully implement contingency contracts, (b) Insure that after training succeeds, and contact with the trainer has faded, family members will conduct weekly family management sessions during which they exercise the problem-solving skills acquired during training. Part I of this paper presents basic assumptions about the intervention needs of single-parent families, and describes how problem-solving training fits these needs. Part II presents the component objectives and steps in training, and describes procedures for evaluation and for fading client-trainer contact. Part III presents the training procedures as they might be gradually presented to a family (or a novice trainer), addressing frequently asked questions.

A Problem-Solving Training Package for the Single Parent Family

Part I

This section presents basic assumptions about the clinical intervention needs of single-parent families and discusses how family problem-solving training meets these needs.

Family Problem-Solving Training

Consistent with an emphasis upon the leadership threats faced by single parents (Blechman & Manning, 1975), Blechman developed and evaluated procedures for training single parents and their children to solve family problems together (Blechman, 1974a, 1974b; Blechman, Olson, & Hellman, 1975; Blechman & Olson, 1975; Blechman, Olson, Schornagel, Halsdorf, & Turner, 1975.) These procedures were designed to fit the special needs of the one-parent family.

1. The burden of problem-solving training is shared by the single parent and the preadolescent and adolescent children. Parent training procedures used with two-parent families often equip the parent to control the child's behavior (e.g., Patterson & Gullion, 1968) rather than to cooperatively solve problems with the children. A moderately authoritarian model of problem solving may be more appropriate to a family in which two parents can share the extra responsibility that accompanies increased parental power and control, than it is to the one-parent family.

2. In problem-solving training, problems raised by the single parent

and by the child are treated as equally important. Other parent training procedures (e.g., Weathers & Liberman, 1975) focus on changing the child's behavior and apply procedures such as contingency contracting exclusively to the child's undesirable behavior. A unidirectional behavior change procedure may be more appropriate to the relationship between two parents and their children, in which two parents are dispropor ionately more powerful than their children. The one-parent family is characterized by relatively less power imbalance than the two-parent family, and the satisfaction of each child in the one-parent family is relatively more important to group cohesiveness than it is in the two-parent family.

3. In problem-solving training, an effort is made to produce interpersonal problem-solving skills that transcend the content of any particular problem raised by the parent or children, and an effort is made to produce skills that are useful in the presence or absence of deviant or undesirable child behavior. Flexibility in problem-solving skills is crucially important to the one-parent family, a small group that is likely to experience repeated changes in group composition (e.g., presence and absence of parent's friends, remarriage). Members of the one-parent family need skills appropriate to everyday happenings, which make it likely that parents' and childrens' needs will be fulfilled. Preadolescent and adolescent children in the one-parent family will benefit doubly if they carry theseskills with them into marriage and parenthood.

4. In problem-solving training, a structured problem-solving routine is embedded into the family's daily living pattern. Weekly family management

sessions, use of the Family Contract Game to solve new problems that crop up during the week, and use of the Cookie Jar to save up descriptions of new problems, are components of this routine. One-parent families, because of the parent's leadership burden, are vulnerable to extreme disorganization and inefficiency. The introduction of structure into the one-parent family's living schedule is beneficial. In contrast, two-parent families have reserves of energy and time, and can afford more flexible, less efficient, and less structured approaches to the management of family problems.

5. In problem-solving training, the use of positive and social rewards is emphasized. In one-parent families, material rewards are often limited, and therefore cannot be relied upon by parents as a routine part of their child-rearing procedures. At the same time, parents and children in one-parent families command significant and valuable positive social rewards, such as affection, free time alone, help with household tasks, and conversation. Reliance upon social rewards should increase the group's cohesiveness, defeat the tendency to spiralling aversive encounters between parent and children, and promote internalization of standards for behavior (Dienstbier, Hillman, Lehnoff, Hillman, & Volkenaar, 1975).

The core component of the problem-solving training package is the Family Contract Game (Blechman 1974a, 1974b). This programmed board game helps family members (without therapist intervention) arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to a specific family problem. The solution, in the form of a contingency contract, specifies a pleasing behavior that family members want to increase, a social or material incentive temporarily made contingent upon occurrence of the pleasing behavior, and other necessary details of a

contingency contract. The great difference between contingency contracts written with the help of the Family Contract Game, and contingency contracts written in the traditional manner with the guidance of a behavior therapist (Stuart, 1969) is that the former contracts are formulated entirely by the family. While the game provides the contract's structure, the family provides the contract's content. The family decides what behavior to strengthen, what type of incentive to make contingent upon pleasing behavior, and how to manage the contract. When the game is used to write contracts, a therapist's values are less likely to influence the contract's content. The game structures all contracts so that positive reinforcement of desirable replacement behavior is planning; it is impossible to write a contract via the game which plans punishment of undesirable behavior.

Part II

This section describes component objectives and training procedures. Evaluation procedures and fading client-therapist contact are also discussed.

Clients. Problem-solving training was designed to suit the social-psychological structure of single-parent families (Blechman & Manning, 1975). Training procedures have primarily been evaluated with this population.

Two-parent families are likely to benefit from problem-solving training, to the extent that they suffer from the conditions which plague the single-parent family (e.g., overburdened leadership, social isolation, normlessness). There is no evidence regarding the utility of problem-solving training with two-parent families. There is reason to believe that changes in women's status and in attitudes towards marriage are reducing the functional differences between one- and two-parent families.

Trainers. In the current clinical-research project, service providers are one male and two females in their 20's with college educations. They were selected for their concern for families and their enjoyment of children in previous activities (e.g., camp counselling, teaching). Personal interviews and letters of recommendation aided in the selection of trainers with good social skills, who value research as well as service.

Service providers were trained by actively working along with a more experienced staff member. The high degree of structure inherent to the training procedures, and detailed descriptions of each session's format hastened the education of service providers.

Ongoing supervision by a clinical psychologist occurs weekly and involves a review of each family's chart and planning for the next contact. Role playing and problem solving take place during these meetings, as well as expressions of support and encouragement by the group for the activities of individual trainers. Expressions of emotional support among the trainers seem crucial, since client families have many problems and contacts with them often generate hopeless feelings.

Overview of training. Assessment is an integral part of training, and doubles the length of time in treatment. Other applications of these procedures may dispense with some but not all assessment. The presentation that follows suggests which assessment procedures are reactive and beneficial, and should be adopted.

Problem-solving training consists of four weeks of pretraining assessment (Baseline 1), nine weeks of training, three weeks of post training assessment (Baseline 2), and eight weeks of fading-out to ensure maintenance of

training effects. A follow-up interview is conducted six months from the Week 24 contact, three assessment sessions are scattered during these six months (the third is the follow-up interview).

Objectives, Procedures, and Timing.

Week 1. Intake interview.

Week 2. Model and prompt pinpointing of problem behavior. Objective: Discourage the presentation of abstract problems and ad hominem discussions of past failures. Generate problems for contingency contracting. Procedure: Parents and children each select "20 problems you wish would happen less often" from a card sort containing 100 common, specific parent (child) problems. Choices enter an individual problem card deck used during training.

Week 4. Provide information about underlying concepts. Objective: Provide central concepts to enhance confidence in training and to reduce impatience which is typical early in treatment. Procedure: Parents and children complete programmed exercises All Together Now (Turner & Blechman, Note 1) which convey training objectives and rationale.

Week 5. Present diverse activity and social rewards. Objective: Reduce parental resentment about sharing scarce resources and paying children "for what they ought to do." Present rewards that can benefit the giver and the receiver, and strengthen affectional bonds. Procedure: Parents and children choose 20 rewards "you wish happened more often" from a card sort containing 150 activity, social, and material rewards. Choices enter a reward card deck used during training.

Week 6. Lessen arguing at home during and after training. Objective: Provide a routine to replace angry outbursts at home, and to weaken behavior

that ordinarily provokes outbursts. Promote a patient, one-step-at-a-time approach to problem solving. Procedure: Family members begin to write notes at home and store them in the Cookie Jar when they observe undesirable behavior; the behavior is not discussed at the time. Notes enter individual problem card decks and at first are discussed only in the clinic during assessment probes and games. Later, they are discussed at home during a Family Management Session.

Week 6. Heighten awareness of pleasing behavior. Objective: Help antagonistic family members see desirable behavior and rehearse tracking. Procedure: Parents and children choose pleasing behaviors which they know their children (parents) perform at least daily; track this behavior during Week 6. Later, all contracts are written to accelerate pleasing behavior.

Week 7-13. Structure contingency contracting to accelerate on-task problem-solving behavior. Objective: Prevent antagonistic families from engaging in off-task behavior during contingency contracting; accelerate on-task problem-solving behavior; insure that the family can reach an agreement by themselves, minimally influenced by others' values. Procedure: The family plays the Family Contract Game each session, writing as many as 11 contracts during training. With the game, in less than 15 minutes, players agree upon and state in a contract: a problem behavior, a pleasing replacement behavior, a contingent reward, and other contract details. Figure 1 illustrates the Family Contract Game board; Figure 2 presents the contract form.

Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

Objective: Rehearse component problem-solving behaviors. Procedure: Before each game, the family receives a simple instruction, which focuses on one component problem-solving activity. The trainer praises compliance with the instruction after the game. The trainer encourages family members to do the same things during informal family problem discussions.

Week 7. Game 1: "Finish the game in 15 minutes."

Week 8. Game 2. "State one specific problem and when it occurs."

Week 8. Game 3 and Week 9, Game 5: "Look at the other player when he states the problem."

Week 9. Game 4: "Recommend a pleasing behavior that the other player can do instead of the problem behavior."

Week 10. Game 6, 7: Optional instructions are tailored to suit the individual family. For example: "During this game, mention three things you like about what the other player is doing."

Week 11. Game 8: Choose a reward that requires tokens.

Week 11. Game 9: Tell the other player how many tokens he must earn before he receives the reward.

Week 16, 20. Objective: Rehearse thinning rewards, shifting material to social rewards, fading contractual to casual agreements, and the weekly Family Management Session. Procedure: During Weeks 16 and 20, the family chooses a contract to carry out for the next month from previously written contracts. They follow procedures spelled out in their Home Training Packet: (1) "During Weeks 1 and 2 of this month, pair the reward with praise and attention, track the pleasing behavior;" (2) Week 3: "End the formal reward,

continue attention and tracking;" (3) Week 4: "Continue attention: end tracking. Each week during your Family Management Session review progress with contract."

Week 24. Objective: Transfer all problem solving to home. Procedure: Family receives their own game and collateral materials and assumes full responsibility for problem solving at home.

All Weeks

Objective: Treat parents' and children's problems equally. Procedure: Parents and children alternate in raising problems during contracting.

Objective: Practice contract compliance. Procedure: Two contracts are carried out until 70% successful, during training; they are negotiated if necessary with the game. Other contracts are stored for later use.

Objective: Heighten the effectiveness of paraprofessional trainers. Each session's format is specified in great detail; trainers record their activities in a progress note after each family contact. During a weekly meeting, adherence to the format is checked and future plans for individual families are reviewed with a clinical psychologist supervisor.

Objective: Promote generalization of treatment effects across trainers. Procedure: Weekly contacts with families rotate across trainers. Whenever possible, audiovisual materials prompt desired behavior during training.

Objective: Model contingent positive social reinforcement. Enhance the relationship between family and trainers. If trainers are selected for their sensitive social skills and their concern for the needs of parents and children, the are likely to excel at identifying desirable family member behavior, and at contingently praising this behavior. The process is

facilitated when trainers always have specific goals; when their goals represent tiny steps toward progress for family members, and when training procedures make it impossible for family members to fail, so that they inevitably act in a desired manner and earn contingent praise. It should be noted that under these conditions, the trainer has opportunity to be both genuine and helpful to the family.

Assessment. To assess problem-solving behavior, during Weeks 2-4 (Baseline 1), Weeks 5-13 (training), and Weeks 14-16 (Baseline 2) each family is videotaped three times while discussing and trying to solve two family problems. Each family's nine ten-minute-long probes is coded by two raters. Using a 10 second interval-recording system, they code problem solutions (e.g., "I'll do the breakfast dishes before school, and you clean up snack dishes after school.") and problem descriptions (e.g., "You didn't make your bed all weekend.") as well as 24 other behavior codes.

To assess a contract's utility, family members keep track of contract compliance and distribution of contingent rewards during the contract's first month. This self-reported data provides trainers and family members with information necessary for the renegotiation of contracts, the thinning of rewards, and shifts from material to social rewards. In addition, collection of such data removes a mystical element from family conflict and discourages family members from desiring expert advice about the best way to deal with their own problems.

Part III

This section answers questions frequently asked by family members and by

trainers during supervision. It is written as if a family were being addressed to illustrate the trainers' approach to such questions. This information would be communicated to a family gradually, in accord with the steps outlined in Part I of this paper.

Family Problem Solving

Family problem solving by joint participation of parents and children is the goal of this approach to family living. At the heart of the approach is a weekly meeting of parents and children to bring up problems which need discussion and solutions, to talk about pleasing things which have happened during the week, and to discuss goals and plans for the coming week. To make the weekly management sessions effective, the family keeps a Cookie Jar where each person writes down problems as he sees them happen. The family uses the Family Contract Game which makes it possible for children to participate in the problem-solving process, and the family uses contracts to establish desirable behavior and social and nonsocial reinforcement to maintain desirable behavior. This is an ongoing process which begins most easily as the family is being formed and continues throughout the life of the family. The family management approach involves the children as well as the adults in the decision-making process; it encourages specific solutions to specific problems; and reinforces pleasing behavior with social rewards. Few families intentionally start their family life this way. Often a change in the family situation, such as divorce, a mother going to work, a child acting out, or a rebellious teenager will make a family reevaluate its relationships and look for new ways to achieve cooperation at home. With the help of a trainer, a family can gradually learn to adopt this approach.

The Family Contract Game

The Family Contract Game is a board game which guides family members through basic steps in interpersonal problem solving. By playing this game, family members change problems into mutually satisfying contractual agreements, usually within fifteen minutes.

Briefly, the game involves a series of interactions between two players which lead them from statement of a problem to formulation of a contract. The steps are: Problem Choice (Squares 1, 2), Please Description (Squares 3, 4, 5, 6), Choice of Reward to be given contingent on Pleasing Behavior (Squares 7, 8, 9, 10), and Contract Settlement (Squares 11, 12, 13, 14). Players can move from one interaction to another only when they have reached agreement. Agreement at each step is rewarded with a bonus. Failure to agree results in game penalties and another opportunity to reach agreement by starting at the beginning of that step again.

Rules of the Game

Every family has problems; in other words, some behaviors of one person displease another. With this game, family members can gradually and with mutual consent replace displeasing behavior with pleasing behavior. This game can be played by a husband and wife, parent and child, or several family members. We use it for interaction between one parent and one child, so it is described here for use by a parent and child.

Getting Ready--The Cookie Jar and Tracking the Please

A week before playing the game, the players provide themselves with a cookie jar. A cookie jar is a container, conveniently located at home, with

blank problem cards and pencil nearby. Each person records problems on these cards and when they occur. On the back of the problem card, the player writes his name.

Examples of problems in the cookie jar:

Mom made me eat spinach at dinner. (John)

Mom didn't come home on time last night. (Ann)

John left his dishes on the table today at lunch. (Mom)

Ann's clothes are on the floor, Wednesday. (Mom)

This house is a mess, Friday. (Dad)

Sally woke me up at 7:00 on Saturday morning. (Mom)

At the end of a week the problems are brought out of the cookie jar and entered in a problem deck on the game board under each player's name.

Tracking the Please

A week before the first game, the players make a place near the cookie jar where they keep track of the other person's pleasing behavior. Each player asks himself, "What does the other player, or family member, do regularly which I like?" He selects one of these pleasing behaviors and records it on a sheet called tracking the please. Whenever the other person performs this pleasing behavior, the player records it on the sheet. This exercise might seem unnecessary but there is often a tendency in families to see only undesirable behavior. It is important for family members to learn to see the desirable behavior which does happen. This exercise serves to make players aware of the desired behavior they do see and gives them practice in tracking the occurrence of pleasing behavior.

Behaviors which might please a child include:

Mom makes my lunch for school.

My mother talks to me at bedtime.

Dad plays baseball with me on weekends.

Mom tells me where she is when she goes out.

A parent might find these pleasing behaviors in a child:

Jane sets the table for dinner.

Bruce does his homework every night without being reminded.

David is dressed for school or time.

Jenny changes into play clothes when she comes home from school.

The Game Equipment

The game equipment includes: the game board, four card decks, (problems, rewards, bonuses, risks), behavior contracts, tracking sheets, play money, pencil, red and blue markers, and a timer. The bonus and risk cards have instructions printed on them. Family members prepare their own individual problem and reward decks before each game. A problem selected from the Cookie Jar is written on each problem card. An activity or a privilege of which an individual would like more, is written on each reward card.

The Timer

The timer is used to set a limit for playing time of fifteen minutes. Not every family will want to use this, but if the family members argue instead of working toward a contract solution, a time limit can be valuable.

The Players, Red and Blue

Red presents the problem. He selects one problem from the cookie jar. Red suggests a pleasing behavior; a replacement for the undesirable behavior.

Red writes the contract at the end of the game, and signs it for agreement. Blue is the banker, and Blue requests the reward he wants for performing the pleasing behavior. Blue agrees to the contract at the end of the game by signing it.

To Start the Game

Each player gets $200 from the bank. If there are only two players, roll the dice to decide who will be Red. The person who rolls the higher number is Red, and presents the first problem. After the first game, Blue becomes Red. Two games can usually be played in one session with each person having a chance to present a problem.

The Play

Red and Blue move together from square to square, reading the instructions on each square.

1. Place markers on Square 1. Red selects one of the problem cards which he has recorded during the week.

2. Move to Square 2. Red clearly describes the displeasing behavior to Blue. Blue needs to know explicitly what he does which displeases Red, when, and how frequently he does it.

Examples: John you left your jacket in the living room after school today. Not

John, you're always leaving your jacket in the living room.

Beth, you left clothes on the bathroom floor four times this week. Not

Beth, you never pick up your clothes.

3. Players move to Square 3. Red changes the problem to a please.

To do this, Red says exactly what he wants Blue to do in order to change the displeasing behavior to a pleasing behavior. A please is a behavior you want more of, not less of. A please is a replacement behavior, one which takes the place of a displeasing behavior, and a please is a specific behavior that can be counted when it happens.

Examples: John, will you hang up your jacket when you take it off. Not

John, please stop leaving your jacket in the living room.

Mom, will you use a quiet voice when you ask me to set the table for dinner. Not

Mom, please avoid yelling at me.

Words like "avoid" and "refrain from" mean the same as "don't," so they are telling a person what not to do instead of what to do more of. Also notice the good example above specifies when Mom is to use a quiet voice.

4. Move to Square 4. Red asks Blue, "Do you like the please?" If Blue says, "Yes," both players jump to Square 6, the Pay Off. (If Blue says "No," they move to Square 5, explained below in No. 12, Risks).

5. Square 6 is the Pay Off. Red receives $50 from the banker. Blue draws a bonus card. Bonus cards provide money or some other game reward.

6. Red and Blue move on to Square 7, Pot of Gold. Here Blue chooses one of the reward cards he has put in the reward deck. Blue looks through the reward cards and selects the one he wants, such as a coke every day.

7. Move to Square 8. Blue reads the reward to Red and asks Red, "Do you like the reward?" If Red agrees, this is the reward Blue will get for performing Red's please.

8. If Red agrees both players move to Square 10, pay off. Both

players draw bonus cards (If Red says "No" to Blue's reward, move to Square 9, explained below in No. 12, Risks.)

9. Red and Blue move to Square 11. Red writes a contract spelling out in detail the pleasing behavior, who will perform the please, and when, what will be the reward, how often the reward will be given, and who will track the pleasing behavior. See Table 1, The Contract.

10. Both players move to Square 12. Red asks Blue, "Do you agree with the contract?" If Blue says "Yes," they move to Square 14 and sign the contract. (If Blue says "No," they move to Square 13, see No. 12, Risks.)

11. Players move to Go. Blue is now Red, and Red is Blue.

12. Risks. If Blue says "No" to the pleasing behavior at Square 4, both players move to Square 5. Each player takes a risk card and follows the instructions on it. The players move back to Square 3, and Blue makes a small change in the please so that he can agree with it.

Example: Blue: I can't remember to hang up my jacket every time I take it off. I'll never remember all the time.

Red: O. K. Let's say, if you hang up your jacket when you come home from school that will please me, and I will give you the reward.

If Red does not agree to Blue's reward at Square 8, both players move to Square 9. Each player draws a risk card. Red makes a small change in the reward so he can agree to it.

Example: Red: I know you like coke, but the dentist says it's really bad for your teeth. How about a sugar-free soda?

Blue: O. K. Diet Coke.

Below is the contract which John and his mother worked out by playing the game.

Insert Table 1 about here

The Contract

The players have completed the game by forming a contract. They have reached the next level of family problem solving, the level where the real rebuilding work goes on within the family. Families working at this second level are called contractors because they are working on a contract, and they are building a family as a contractor might build a house.

To carry out the contract, there is a series of steps to follow, just as there are steps to follow to reach a contract. The purpose of the contract, of course, is to help a person replace an undesired behavior with desired behavior by means of rewarding the pleasing behavior.

These are the steps to follow:

1. Follow the contract carefully for one week. Keep track of each occurrence of the pleasing behavior when it happens with verbal recognition, and give the reward which has been agreed to in the contract. Ignore the times when the pleasing behavior does not occur, but mention each time it does happen.

2. At the Family Management meeting at the end of the first week, discuss how the contract is going.

   a. Did the pleasing behavior happen at all? Be pleased with every occurrence of the pleasing behavior. Remember changing behavior takes a long time and considerable encouragement.

b. How many times did the please happen?

c. Is the please happening 70% of the possible times it could happen?

For example: Is John hanging up his jacket four days after school? Has Mom asked me quietly to set the table five times this week?

If the please is happening this often, contractors are ready for No. 4.

d. If the pleasing behavior is not happening frequently, follow directions in No. 3 below.

3. Ask yourselves these questions:

a. What would make this contract work?

b. Was the reward given regularly?

c. Does the reward need to be more frequent or a different one?

d. Am I nagging or complaining about the contract? It will help to talk about the contract only during family management sessions. At other times, when the pleasing behavior does not happen, take time to think of ways to help it happen.

e. Is the pleasing behavior too complex for one contract?

For example: Please pick up your clothes.

Perhaps that could be simplified to:

Hang up your clothes right after school.

Or:

Please fix the meals I like.

Perhaps that could be changed to:

Please let me choose the food for dinner every Wednesday.

f. If contract terms seem unworkable, go back to the game and renegotiate the contract. To renegotiate, Blue makes a change in the pleasing behavior, so he can perform it more regularly. Red asks Blue if he is satisfied with the reward. Red and Blue make suggestions about the reward until it is an agreeable one. Red rewrites the contract including revisions which will make it work better.

4. If the pleasing behavior has been happening frequently, i.e., about 70% of the time, the contract is a good one and it can be continued for another week. It is important to continue rewarding the pleasing behavior until it is thoroughly learned. Track the please, give an immediate verbal approval every time it happens, and give the contract reward as stated.

5. At the next family management session, discuss the contract again. If it is going well, i.e., the pleasing behavior happens about 70% of the time, it is time to write a contract fading from nonsocial to social rewards if nonsocial rewards were included in the original contract. Fading is a process which happens naturally and informally in many families. For example, when a child is first learning to dress himself, a parent may give the child his favorite cereal for breakfast everytime he dresses himself. As the child masters this new skill, the parent may then praise him for dressing himself.

6. Thinning. When a contract has been working successfully with social rewards for several weeks, it is time to consider dispensing with a formal contract. As a result, social rewards will gradually thin out. Approval will happen sporadically. Of course, family members should constantly try to catch each other being good. As the pleasing behavior becomes thoroughly

assimilated and happens naturally, the need for external rewards diminishes. At this point, the person who is performing the pleasing behavior often rewards himself by feeling pleased with his new behavior.

7. When the first contract is working well and the pleasing behavior continues to happen as the social rewards are thinned out, it is time to introduce a new contract. At the next family management session, select a new contract from ones which have been completed by the family games. The contractor who changed his behavior in the first contract becomes the rewarder in the next contract. Follow steps 1 through 6 as before. Continue to reward the first contract with approval.

Suggestions to Parents

Treat your child's requests for behavior change in you as seriously as your own requests to him. A child may not be able to give you approval each time you perform the please. Help him track the please. Be pleased yourself when you perform the new behavior.

Ignoring undesirable behavior in your child is a difficult feat. It may mean replacing an automatic response with new behavior yourself.

For example: Try looking away, or breathing deeply. Perhaps you may want to leave the room to help you ignore the undesirable behavior and allow you to think of something else.

Improving Family Contract Skills

Good players learn to make contracts which: (a) pinpoint specific pleasing behavior accurately, (b) provide enjoyable rewards which are easy to give, (c) are clearly stated and easily tracked, (d) provide satisfaction to both players.

Good skills come from writing good pleases. Tables 2 and 3 provide examples of problems and pleases which parents and children have worked out.

Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

Players can practice changing their own family problems into good pleases. Follow these rules to do it.

1. Use the cookie jar all week. Write down the displeasing behavior and when it happens.

2. Select a problem which is observable and specific.

For example: My mother forgets to buy Wheaties for me. Not

My mother doesn't buy the cereal I like.

3. Change the displeasing behavior to desirable behavior, a please. Say exactly what you want the other person to do to please you.

A common problem which children bring up is "My mother nags me." A parent's first reaction quite often is to say, "I wouldn't nag if you would do what I tell you." Instead the parent can help the child pinpoint when the nagging happens.

For example: The problem is my mother nags me.

Mom: When do I do that most often?

Ann: Usually when I'm slow eating breakfast.

Mom: That's true. What shall we do about it?

Ann: Don't nag me when I'm eating.

Mom: You're still saying what you don't want. What <u>do</u> you want?

Ann: Well, maybe get me up earlier, and let me eat slowly.

Tell me once when it's time to leave for the bus.

Mom: O. K. Let's get up at 7:00, and I will tell you one time when it's time to leave for the bus.

Ann: O. K.

Good skills involve good rewards. Good rewards don't often cost money. They are more often the pleasurable activities, simple privileges and reassuring expressions of approval which help make family life enjoyable. For example, parents enjoy: free time, talking with their child about his interests and activities, affection from the child, a quiet morning in bed, shopping trips together. Children enjoy: short trips, a special TV program, a friend for dinner, time alone with the parent, playing a game, ice cream for dessert.

A good reward is something which the person wants more often. A good reward is also one the other person likes to give. Robert Weiss said: "Don't ask for a reward which the other person does not like to give. Likewise, don't agree to give a reward which you know you don't like to give" (Weiss, Note 2). For example, a child wants to go the amusement park in exchange for desired behavior. The mother does not enjoy amusement parks because the rides make her sick. For them, it is not a satisfactory reward.

Sometimes a parent will say, "Isn't rewarding a child the same thing as bribing him?" Not really. Rewarding desired behavior draws attention to exactly what a parent expects of a child. Conversely, it helps the parent know exactly what the child wants from the parent. Expectations are clear and performing the desired behavior brings a pleasurable reward. It is similar to doing math problems in school. If a child does his math homework and is never told which problems are right and which ones are wrong, his

math progress is slow. If his problems are corrected and he is helped with the ones which he did wrong, he learns new skills more quickly.

A good reward is contingent on desired behavior. Acknowledge every occurrence of the pleasing behavior immediately with a simple thank you or a token, and give the reward as stated in the contract.

Players can improve their reward skills by practicing these rules:

1. Write down rewards as you think of ones which are pleasing to you and which you want more often.

2. Give approval to the person each time he performs your please. Give the reward when you agreed to give it.

Good skills involve reaching good contracts. Skillful players disagree with each other. They feel free to bring up problems they see. They listen to the problems others bring up. They are willing to change their behavior to a pleasing one, they are willing to compromise, and they trust that their pleasing behavior will bring them pleasure in return. These skills take practice to develop. Changing behavior takes patience and time. Make the first contracts easy ones to carry out. Be pleased with every success. Gradually add those difficult problems, the ones which have been problems for a long time.

Reference Notes

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Table 1

A Sample Family Contract

Between Mother and Son[a]

Red: Mom Blue: John Date: June 18

1. Problem states as a Please...What you would like Blue to do more often: Please hang up your jacket.

2. When Blue should perform the Please: When you come home from school

3. What will be Blue's Reward: A diet coke--one six-ounce bottle

4. How often must Blue perform the Please: Everyday after school--Monday-Friday

5. When will the Reward be given: After dinner Monday-Friday (if jacket is hung up)

6. Who will track the Please? Where will Pleases be recorded? Mom and John On the refrigerator

7. Signatures: Red: Helen Smith

Blue: John Smith

[a]Underlined words show how the contract form might be completed by a family.

Table 2

Examples of General and Specific Parent Problems, and Corresponding Pleases

General Problem	Specific Problem	Please
1. My child bothered me when I was on the phone.	Jane, you interrupted me when I was on the phone, last night.	Please write me a note if you have a question when I am on the phone.
2. My child talked in a whining voice.	Connie, you whined when you asked for help with your homework.	Connie, will you ask me in a quiet voice to help you with your homework.
3. My child went to bed after his bedtime.	David, you stayed up until 9:30 four nights last week.	David, please be in bed by 9:00 every night except Friday and Saturday.
4. My child was rude to my friends.	Michael, you were rude to my friend Jean last week. You didn't say hello and you insulted her.	Mike, please say hello to my friends.
5. My child left clothes lying around.	Barbara, you left your dirty clothes on the floor.	Please put your dirty clothes in the wash.
6. My child was late coming home for a meal.	Jack, you were late for supper three times last week.	Please come home at 6:00, or before, every night.

Table 3

Examples of General and Specific Child Problems and Corresponding Pleases

General Problem	Specific Problem	Please
1. My parent fixed food I dislike.	Mom, you made me eat vegetables that I don't like.	Please fix salad, corn or peas for dinner.
2. My parent came home late.	Dad, you came home late twice last week. I didn't know where you were.	Please call me if you won't be home by 6:00.
3. My parent looked at my private belongings without permission.	Mom, you snooped in my desk at least twice last week and read my mail.	Mom, will you let me have a lock for one drawer in my desk.
4. My parent interrupted when I was talking.	Dad, you didn't let me finish what I wanted to say last night.	Dad, please let me finish what I am saying before you talk.
5. My parent nagged about homework.	Mom, you nagged me every day last week about homework. You know I don't like to do it in the afternoon.	Please remind me about homework only once after supper.
6. My parent talked too loud at my bedtime.	Mom, you talked too loud on the phone to Jack when I was trying to go to sleep last night.	Will you talk quietly when I'm in bed.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Family Contract Game board.

Figure 2. Contract Form.

family contract

Problem Cards

Reward Cards

Bonus Cards

Risk Cards

Contract

Family Contract Game

Date _____

Red _____ Blue _____

a) Problem stated as a Please...What you would like Blue to do more often:

_____

_____

b) When Blue should perform the Please:

_____

c) What will be Blue's Reward:

_____

d) How often must Blue perform the Please:

_____

e) When will the Reward be given:

_____

f) Who will track the Please? Where will Pleases be recorded?

_____

g) Signatures: Red _____

Blue _____